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20 CHEETAHS TO ARRIVE FROM KENYA BETWEEN FEBRUARY AND SEPTEMBER

The third batch of 20 cheetahs will arrive at Madhya Pradesh's Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary between February 25 and Sept 25

15-DAY QUARANTINE AT GANDHI SAGAR SANCTUARY

The cheetahs will undergo a 15-day quarantine before their release into the wild, officials said. A separate enclosure has been created at the sanctuary to house them during the quarantine period. A team of wildlife scientists will inspect the facility. Efforts will be made to pair male and female cheetahs, Dr Abhijeet Pawde, a senior wildlife scientist, said

KUNO NATIONAL PARK NOW HAS 25 CHEETAHS

- Twenty cheetahs—eight from Namibia in 2022 and 12 from South Africa in 2023—have been brought to India under 'Project Cheetah', the Centre's initiative to reintroduce the species to India
- Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park now hosts 25 cheetahs, including the 12 from South Africa and their 13 cubs born here

1952

WHEN CHEETAHS WERE DECLARED EXTINCT IN INDIA

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

12 jump off train after false alarm, run over by another

SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI @ Mumbai

AT least 12 rail passengers were killed and 55 other injured after they jumped off their train reportedly over a false fire alarm and were hit by another speeding train around the same time while crossing the tracks in Maharashtra's Jalgaon district on Wednesday.

Reports said someone on the Pushpak Express, which was traveling from Lucknow to Mumbai, pulled the chain, raising a false alarm. As the locopilots applied brakes to slow down the fast-moving train, sparks either from the hot axle or brake-jamming and the smoke spread into the cabin. It triggered panic among passengers who assumed a fire had broken out on the train.

In an attempt to save themselves, some passengers jumped off the Pushpak Express unaware that the Karnataka Express was fast approaching from the opposite direction.

As they tried to cross the track, many of them were mowed down by the Karnataka Express.

The accident took place between Maheji and Pardhade stations near Pachora, more than 400 km from Mumbai. Both trains later reached their respective next stations and the accident site has been cleared, the police said.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, expressing grief over the incident, said, "The tragic incident of the loss of lives in a very unfortunate incident near Pachora in Jalgaon district is deeply distressing. I pay my heartfelt tributes to them," he said. "We are monitoring the situation and all necessary assistance is being provided immediately. I am in touch with the district administration," Fadnavis said, adding, Jalgaon General Hospital and nearby private hospitals are being kept ready for treating the injured passengers.

A crowd at the site of the accident, near Pachora railway station | PTI

₹5 LAKH EX-GRATIA ANNOUNCED

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced a ₹5 lakh ex-gratia for the next of kin of those killed and said the government will bear the cost of treatment for the injured

TOLL COULD INCREASE

The Jalgaon district administration said 12 bodies were recovered from the track. It said the toll could go up as some of the passengers have sustained serious injuries

In first meet, US flags irregular migration issue

Rubio's first bilateral meet of his tenure with Jaishankar indicates trajectory of India ties

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

IN his first bilateral meeting after taking charge as US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio told External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar that the Trump administration is keen to strengthen the US' strategic partnership with India and urged him to address concerns of 'irregular migration'.

Jaishankar said India strongly supports legal migration. Later, talking to reporters in Washington, the minister said he flagged the delays faced by Indian citizens in obtaining US visas.

Jaishankar-Rubio meeting was held at the headquarters of the State Department on Tuesday. That Rubio, a China hawk and an ardent advocate of India-US relationship, chose to have his first bilateral meeting with his Indian counterpart is seen as a signal that the Trump administration is keen to bolster ties with India.

During the meeting, they discussed ways to expand the strength and scope of their relationship and a possible meeting between President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a 'mutually convenient, earliest date'.

The State Department said both sides vowed to strengthen the bilateral relationship. "Secretary Rubio also emphasized the Trump Administration's desire to work with India to advance economic ties and address concerns related to irregular migration," its statement read.

Illegal and irregular migration was a key issue Trump raised during his campaign. In October last year, the US Department of Homeland Security deported over 1,100 Indian nationals as part of its efforts to target unauthorised migration. Jaishankar said India needs to verify the nationality of these nationals, adding: "We are open to legitimate return of people."

Jaishankar said the Trump administration has substantial interest in the ongoing cooperation between the US and India, adding that he is optimistic about the trajectory of the bilateral ties. He said the emerging and critical technologies, semiconductors, and alternative supply chains are the focus areas of the new administration. Jaishankar said he and Rubio exchanged views on a wide range of regional and global issues.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio during a meeting, in Washington DC | PTI

QUAD HAS A MESSAGE FOR CHINA

In a signal to China, foreign ministers from Quad countries opposed any unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion | P11

TRUMP NUANCES H-1B STAND

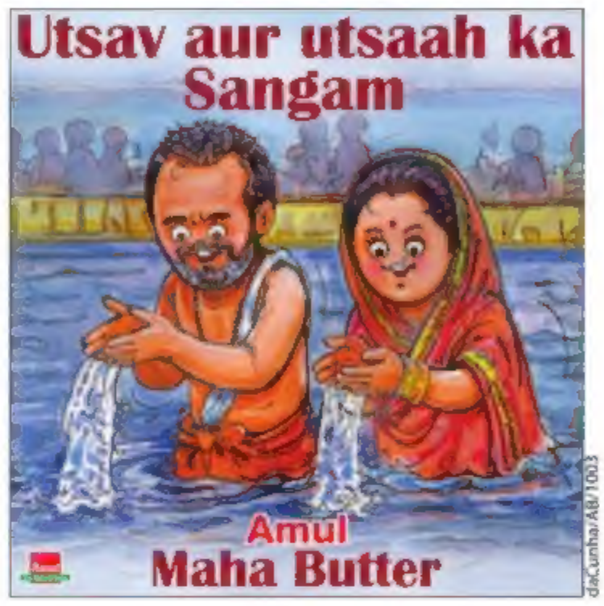
Trump said he likes 'both sides of the argument' on H-1B foreign guest workers' visa, noting that he likes "very competent people" coming into the country

DIVERSITY STAFF SENT ON LEAVE

Trump administration directed that all federal diversity, equity and inclusion staff be put on leave. Agencies told to develop plans to lay them off | P14

DARKNET OPERATOR PARDONED

Trump pardoned Ross Ulbricht, who was sentenced to life for running Silk Road darknet marketplace that allegedly facilitated sale of drugs



PRELIM LIST

Tata, MMS lead Bharat Ratna race

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

IT'S that time of the year when speculation mounts over the possible recipients of the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour. Among the awardees this year could be towering politicians. There could also be a surprise element on the list that is released around Republic Day.

While all sorts of names are doing the rounds, sources said industrialist Ratan Tata and former prime minister Manmohan Singh are in the preliminary shortlist for the most coveted award, albeit post-humously. The demand for conferring it on Tata picked up pace after his demise in October. The Maharashtra cabinet, too, passed a resolution recommending it.

The demand for honouring Manmohan Singh came from the Congress and a few NDA partners, after he passed away on December 26. The government in its outreach offered two plots within the Rashtriya Smriti Sthal to build his memorial.

Another legacy could be up for grabs if Dalit icon and BSP founder Kanshi Ram figures on the list. BSP chief Mayawati has repeatedly pitched for his recognition with a Bharat Ratna.

Among the other names that are doing the rounds are Samajwadi Party patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav, freedom fighter and Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar, educationist couple Jyotirao Govindrao Phule and Savitribai Phule, Bihar's first chief minister Shri Krishna Singh, B P Mandal, whose Mandal Commission report triggered social engineering and gave reservations to OBCs, and former Odisha chief minister Biju Patnaik. The BJP has the highest regard for Savarkar, who is a lightning rod for criticism by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

Interestingly, senior BJP leader and Union minister Giriraj Singh recently suggested the Bharat Ratna for Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and his former Odisha counterpart Naveen Patnaik.

BEFORE OR AFTER REPUBLIC DAY

The government could recommend three-four names for the Bharat Ratna before Republic Day or after February 5, when Delhi is scheduled to go for polls

14 KILLED, 29 HURT IN YELLAPUR, RAICHUR ROAD ACCIDENTS

SUBHASH CHANDRA NS & BASAVARAJ BHOGAVATI @ Yellapur/Raichur

FOURTEEN people were killed and 29 injured in two road accidents in Uttara Kannada and Raichur districts on Tuesday night and early Wednesday.

Ten people were killed and 19 injured when a vegetable-laden truck in which they were travelling overturned at Gullapura village near Arbail Ghats in Yellapur taluk of Uttara Kannada around 4am on Wednesday.

The truck was proceeding to Kumta with vegetables for weekly shandy. Police said the driver lost control of the speeding truck, which overturned. Three of the five people, who were in the truck's cabin, died, while two escaped miraculously. Those sitting behind suffered injuries and were found buried under vegetable sacks. Some of them might have died due to suffocation. Those sitting behind were thrown out of the truck after it overturned, said a police source.

The deceased have been identified as Fayaz Jamkhandi, Wasim Mudigeri, Ejaz Mulla, Sadiq Paras, Ghulam Hussain Gudusaab, Imtiyaz Mudigeri, Alfaz Mandakki, Gilani Gafar Jakathi, Aslam Benni and Jalal Savanur, all aged between 21 and 35. They were vegetable vendors from Savanur taluk in Haveri district and had hired the truck to Kumta to sell their produce.

The truck that overturned near Arbail Ghats on Wednesday

IMD ISSUES FOG ALERT

The IMD forecast fog or mist over most parts of North Karnataka from January 23 to 28 and cautioned motorists to regularly check highway fog alerts. P7

Four killed

Four people, including three students of Guru Sarvabhouma Sanskrit Vidyapeetha of Mantralaya in Andhra Pradesh, were killed and 10 others injured when the vehicle in which they were traveling overturned near Sindhanur in Raichur district on Tuesday night. The deceased have been identified as Hayavadana, 18, of Ballari, Sujayeendra, 22, from Mantralaya, Abhilash, 20, of Koppal and driver Kamsali Shiva, 20. P7

Gaganyaan crew module integrated with propulsion

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Bengaluru

THE Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC) dispatched the crew module for the first uncrewed Gaganyaan (G1) mission after successfully integrating it with the liquid propulsion system on January 21, 2024. The crew module was dispatched to Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC).

The liquid propulsion system, called the Crew Module Propulsion System (CMPS), is a bi-propellant-based Reaction Control System (RCS) and is meant for pitch, yaw and roll (a precise three-axis control) of the crew module.

The control will be initiated following separation of service module during the descent and atmospheric re-entry phase until the deployment of parachute-based deceleration system. The system employs twelve 100N thrusters, pressurisation system with high pressure gas bottles and the propellant feed system along with the associated fluid control components, ISRO said.

The Crew Module Uprighting System (CMUS), designed by VSSC, was also integrated with the crew module at LPSC. The crew module will undergo further integration operations at the VSSC before it is sent to the UR Rao Satellite Centre in Bengaluru for the final phase of integration of the orbital module.

Gaganyaan-G1 — expected to be launched in early part of this year — and the subsequent two uncrewed missions Gaganyaan-G2 and G3 will lead to India's maiden human spaceflight. These uncrewed missions will mimic the actual crewed mission right from lift-off to the end of mission to validate the mission capabilities, safety parameters and critical technologies, including that of the Human-rated Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (HLVM3).

BJP gen secy spoke to me rudely, says Sriramulu

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

DIFFERENCES within BJP came to the fore again as senior BJP leader and former minister B Sriramulu openly expressed his displeasure over BJP General Secretary Radha Mohan Das Agarwal's accusation against him at the party core committee meeting on Tuesday that he did not for work the party candidate during the Sandur bypoll.

The Core Committee meeting was attended by former chief ministers Basavaraj Bommai, DV Sadananda Gowda, senior BJP leader CT Ravi, Sriramulu, former Deputy CM Dr Ashwath Narayana and others.

Sriramulu told *The New Indian Express*, "At the meeting, Agarwal spoke to me rudely in front of all and alleged that I did not work in the recent Sandur bypoll that led to the party's loss. But I worked for our party candidate Bangaru Hanumanthu right from filing nomination. How can someone even make an allegation without any proof?"

Sriramulu further said BJP state president BY Vijayendra, who had seen him work for the party candidate, did not defend him.

"I have been honest with the party. I had contested from two places and even gave a tough competition to Siddaramaiah in Badami [2018]. I contested from Molakalmuru after party leaders told me to contest.

CONTINUED ON: P4

They (party leaders) had assured me that I would be made a deputy chief minister, but they did not. Even then, I worked for the party —B Sriramulu, BJP leader and former minister

Delay in supply of DL/RC smart cards hits RTOs

BANSY KALAPPA @ Bengaluru

REGIONAL Transport Offices (RTOs) across the state are facing a crisis in issuing smart card driving licences (DLs) and vehicle registration certificates (RCs). In some RTOs, the pendency has increased to around 15,000 cards. This has left applicants in the lurch, with many of them clearing their driving tests way back in November.

Sources said, "Karnataka is facing, perhaps, the worst crisis in dispatching DL and RC smart cards. Applicants have been waiting for DL and RC cards for more than 50 days. RTOs across the state have to issue 7 lakh cards and some estimate, the number could be around 8 lakh. Driving licence seekers complain that officials at RTOs tell them to wait as there is a problem in getting smart cards from the head office."

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy, who acknowledged that there is a problem in dispatching DL and RC smart cards, said, "Smart cards were being supplied by 'Rose Mart', a service provider, and the agreement with it ended in December last. We have invited fresh tenders for supply of smart cards. The department is scrutinising the tenders. It is an administrative process and procedures have to be followed. It will take some time. We are trying to expedite the process."

On when the issue of pendency will be sorted out, he said, "We issue about 20,000 cards daily and we will sort it out in about 10 days from now." P4

EXPRESS READ

SEBI: Sachet-sized mutual fund SIPs will help poor

New Delhi: To facilitate participation from low-income groups in mutual funds, regulator SEBI on Wednesday floated a consultation paper on 'sachetisation' of mutual funds. In its consultation paper, Sebi has proposed a sachetized mutual fund product — small ticket systematic investment plan (SIP) of Rs 250 | P15